bit because of the insects or because of the fungi, but if you look at the branch they are so beautiful because of the harmony in it. So the Sangha is like that. Members of the Sangha may not be perfect but if we learn how to live in the Sangha with harmony and trust, each one in his/her position, that Sangha can perform a miracle, everyone who comes and touches the Sangha can be transformed.

The environment can have a very strong impact on the genetics, the culture of spirituality is transforming the cells in our body, the genes in our body. It is true! When you look at the white chrysanthemums becoming violet you see the wonders of life, you see the impact of culture and spirituality on the genetic heritage of mankind. So the Buddha has transmitted to us many genes, many elements of the spirituality of culture that will continue to have a deep impact on our lives. We have to be able to allow these elements to penetrate for our transformation and for our healing and the Sangha is the agent. The Sangha represents the Buddha, the Sangha practicing always the career of the Buddha and the Dharma, so having trust in the Sangha it is very important because the Sangha is the Buddha. And I have said several times that the next Buddha may take the form of a Sangha and each one of us can be a cell of that body, that Buddhakaya, that Buddha body.

We should give up what we consider to be our knowledge, our experience, because that knowledge has not helped very much. That experience has not helped very much, we still suffer a lot that is why we should be ready to give up in order to be free for the penetration of the Dharma, of the Sangha, of the Buddha to become possible and taking refuge in the Sangha, trust in the Sangha, allow the Sangha to transport you, to carry you. It is a comfortable feeling, a comfortable practice. And taking refuge in the Sangha is not a declaration of faith: it is our daily practice.

Questions & Answers

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on Dec 9, 1999 in Plum Village, France.

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Today is the 9th of December 1999, we are in the Lower Hamlet and it is time for us to ask questions concerning the Dharma talks that have been given in the last few weeks. You may ask in French, or in English or in Vietnamese. Let us take advantage of it.

Q: When I was in high school I took a psychology class and my psychology teacher was a behaviorist. And one aspect of the behaviorist school that he talked about was the idea that... he liked ton explain that we didn't have any free will, and that everything that happened to us was determined by our outside environment, sort of predestination in way, one domino falls and the rest of everything comes into place. My question is, I am wondering if Buddhism supports that notion because the idea of emptiness and interbeing seem to point in that direction for me, I am not sure. In your commentary on the Prajnaparamita sutra you talked about how we are empty because we are full of everything else, and that basically was what interbeing was, in a sense. So what I am wandering is, is there free will that makes the determination between which paths we take, and if there is a free will how is that reconciled with the idea of emptiness? Because if there is something that is inside that is screening, the outside environment it seems like not only am I a product of everything else that is outside but there is also something that is inside that is propelling something that I consider myself forward. To put it in the most basic terms, are emptiness and free will mutually exclusive?

A: Emptiness is made of free will and free will of emptiness. And that is the meaning of emptiness. It is like the right is made of the left, the left is made of the right and if you want to say that only one exists there is not emptiness. So you can answer the question of free will by yourself, with your direct experience of emptiness because we should live the insight of emptiness and not just talk about it. When you come to Plum Village you are given an opportunity to practice mindfulness, you are given equal opportunity. Like when you walk you can choose to walk in mindfulness, when you wash the dishes you may like to wash in mindfulness, and then there are brothers and sisters who are doing the same. So you have many opportunities to put into practice the teaching of mindful living. When you walk with mindfulness you become free and freedom is something that you can experience. Because you can walk as a slave being caught by the past, by the future, by your anger, by your afflictions but you can go back to your in breath, out breath and walk as a free person.

So freedom is a reality, not just a notion and it is a function of your practice and there are those of us who practice better than others and this alone proves that free will is possible. In the light of the practice this seems to be the only kind of freedom that we can get and if we know how to inherit, to make use of this freedom you will have a larger freedom which will be the fruit of this practice of freedom. Looking back at yourself, you know that to be free or not to be free depends on you to a large extent. So, go back to your breath and breathing in liberate yourself. This is something that we can do at any time of the day and we dont have to be caught in the speculation about whether freedom exists or not because we know very well that slavery is a reality but also freedom is a reality and that is the meaning of our getting together and leaning on each other for the practice.

Q: Je ne voudrais surtout pas paratre pr tencieux, mais il me semble que ce que nous lisons, ce que nous entendons, ait une connotation un peu pessimiste parce quil est question du manas 6-1 et 2, les deux fonctions du manas que vous avez not 6-1/6-2, mais le paragraph 6-2 ne parle que de manas passionn , jai entendu et jai lu dautre part cette stance qui est affiche aussi dans de diff rents mots, vivant dans le monde sans tre affect par les afflictions du monde, toute souffrance teinte, le bodhisattva passe magestueusement sur les vagues de la naissance et de la mort.頻 Je pense que l il conviendrait, la lumire de ce que nous avons lu ce matin, de lire: vivant dans le monde sans tre affect par les afflictions du monde, toute

passion teinte, parce quen fait les souffrances sont les fruits de la passion. Nest-il pas possible alors de penser que ce paragraph 6-2 cest dire le manas passionn , qui par la pratique dun bodhisattva, la pratique assidue, continuelle, efficace dun bodhisattva va perdre ses quatre passions, sans cela il y aurait on pourrait imaginer peuttre un paragraph 6-3 quon pourrait imaginer, permettez-moi de le lire☐: 6-3 est le manas de fonctionement dun bodhisattva qui a teint le quatre passions. Il serait le support des connaissances obtenues par le vue juste, le support des actions justes, des pens es justes, des perceptions justes ce qui fait que la vue sur le moi spar serait teinte. Mais le bodhisattva qui vit dans le monde a besoin du manas pour couter, pour sesntir, pour goter, pour marcher, pour dormir. Est-ce que cette vue serait correcte?
A: Manas is a kind of perception characterized by misunderstanding, by ignorance and therefore based on manas in order to act, to speak and to think you make a lot of mistakes and that is why the bodhisattva in the process of her practice learns to act, to think and to speak on the basis of wisdom, the wisdom of non discrimination, the wisdom that reveals that there is no separated self. So it is perfectly possible for anyone to continue acting and helping and serving without manas, because without manas you have something much better, that is the wisdom of non discrimination (Sanskrit) and that is to replace manas. That does not mean that you have to throw manas away in order to have non discriminative wisdom because it is manas that will be transformed into the wisdom of non discrimination. When you have a cup of water that is not drinkable and you throw it away and then you have no water at all you have to seek ways to transform that water into something that you can drink. That what it means by transformation so if you are in a desert and if you are dying of thirst and then if you have a glass of muddy water you should not throw it away, you have to keep it and transform it into drinkable water. So manas within yourself, there is wisdom in it, so the fact is not throwing away something but to transform it.

The other day Jacques also presented a question in a written form, he said, because I was drawing that circle representing alaya serving as the cause for all defiled Dharma, this is effect and this is the base for this manifestation, but when we look deeply into this manifestation we can also see the base in it and that is why I propose to wipe away the outer circle because the outer circle can be seen already in the inner circle. So his question is, if this is defiled Dharmas and then where can we get the purity of the Tathagatha, the ground of enlightenment? so this half moon should be retained in order to provide us with our opportunity for enlightenment and purification and so on. So he did not feel comfortable when I wiped this out. This is a very typical kind of question, very typical kind of thinking based on dualism, because when you think of something as defiled, as negative, you immediately want to throw it away. And that is a strong tendency in many people and now we must learn how to think in a non dualistic way, it is defiled, it is negative, but you have to keep it and transform it because out of it there is nothing else. It is like the glass of muddy water, if you throw it out you don't have water, you have to transform.

So all the defiled Dharmas, all the negative things contain within themselves the positive ground, the ground of enlightenment. That is why it was so clear that in the beginning you recognize as e but a little later you recognize that c is in e. And if c is in e already, why do you have to keep c outside the e, so the practice is how to learn to think, to speak, and to see things in non-dual terms. Because the other day Thay already talked about the top soil and that if we looked deeply into the top soil we sees the green leaves and if we look deeply into the green leaves we can see the top soil in it. Because without the top soil there would be no green leaves and if there are no green leaves there is no top soil, so they contain each other - that is inter containing, interbeing, that is an art of being, an art of talking and we have to get used to it. Ca va, Jacques, cõest clair? Another question? OK.

Q: Dear Thay, because the alaya is everywhere and there is non duality, and in the leaf you can see the soil. I can recognize an enlightened being, I can maybe see him, he is part of me somehow, how come he cannot enlighten me. Everything has to come from me and how come there is no interaction possible on this if I am part of everything and everything is part of me. How come?
A: When you look deeply you will be able to remove the notion of inside and outside and the discrimination between you and him, you and her will be removed because the inside contains the outside and etc. I would like to bring you a very concrete example. You are a member of the Sangha living in the Sangha. You are a monastic or a lay person living in the Sangha. You may have the impression that your Sangha does not support you enough. The Sangha does not care about you, and you believe that until the Sangha comes and supports you and takes care of you, you will not be able to make progress in the practice. Sometime a monastic will think like that. Sometime a lay person will think like that. She or he will wait for an act, an attitude from the Sangha, from the Teacher in order for her/him to do all right. Right? But at the same time that person knows that the Sangha is within him/her, and if that person knows how to take care of the Sangha, and the Teacher in him/her she will be doing all right, there is no inside or outside and discrimination and blaming will cease to exist.

We have been in Plum Village some twenty years and every time I practice walking meditation I always pay attention to the trees that we have planted. Many of the pine trees have been planted on the first or second year of Plum Village and I use to stop and look at the cedar and the pine tree and smile to them. I tend to look at them as practitioners, a monk, a nun or a lay person and I say: this novice is sixteen years old and is doing very well and I touch the branch of the pine and I smile at the pine. I noticed that when you are planted as a small tree it is very easy for you. Taking roots in the soil is much easier than if you are planted as a big tree. You know, in the Upper Hamlet there were five or six pines that belonged to the category called umbrella pine and we took them home one day, quite big, about three meters. And it was more difficult to take care than when you plant small pines. I remember we had difficulties the first year, the second and the third year because there was a lot of wind in the Upper Hamlet, and we did not try to help the pines to stand firm against the wind. That is why every winter the pine would go like this and then the soil is very wet, very soft and the wind is capable of making the pine incline like this. So when the rain stopped we used the tractor to pull it back to the upright position. And during two or three years we did like that, and that is why this pine was not doing very well in the first three years.
That is why when we planted the three big cedars we tried our best, and asked a professional to help us pin it down with three very solid sticks. That is why after the second year we could take out the sticks and the cedars became very strong.

It is the same thing with a practitioner, if you allow yourself to be blown by the wind. If your practice is off and on – you stay for a few months and then you leave, and then you come back for a few months and you leave, it is like allowing the wind to upset you, to make you lose your stability, your solidity. And the condition of non-interruption is not here for you to grow as a good practitioner. You may have the impression that the teacher does not support you that the sangha does not support you. The tree may think that the soil is not kind to it, but the soil is always there supporting all the trees, with a non-discriminative attitude. The soil provides the tree with the basic conditions, opening herself up to receive the tree, embrace the tree. But if the tree does not try to get rooted as soon as possible, then the soil cannot do anything. So to cultivate solidity, to cultivate breathing, to cultivate taking refuge in the sangha is your practice. If you go back and take advantage of the soil in you, take advantage of the sangha in you then the rooting will take place, and if the rooting takes place you'll be a very beautiful tree.
If you do not allow yourself to be rooted in the Sangha, if you don't allow the Sangha to be rooted in you your practice will not bring you anywhere at all. So even if you do not practice

a lot of walking meditation, or sitting meditation, or chanting, even if you don't learn a lot of scriptures. But you just spend your time with your brothers and sisters in an intelligent way so that your sisters and brothers are rooted in you and you are rooted in your sisters and brothers you are doing it right. And one week, two weeks is enough to let you know that you have made progress, so we should not say that spending time with your brothers and sisters is a waste of time, no. Your time is to do that, your time is to do that, to get rooted in the Sangha and to allow the Sangha to be rooted in yourself, this is very important. That was the practice of the Buddha, that was the practice of the monks and the nuns at the time of the Buddha. So if your practice does not give you that kind of rooting you should know that practice is not very helpful. Even drinking tea together, or washing the dishes together, or working in the garden together. All these things can be considered to be right practice because they help you to be rooted, it helps the Sangha to be rooted in you. And with the insight of interbeing, it means the insight of non discrimination, you see that the outside is the inside and the inside is the outside. You can think that the soil is always trying to help, the sun is always trying to help, but if the tree does not try its best to root in the soil and profit from the sunshine, the sunshine cannot do anything, the soil cannot do anything. I hope my answer was helpful to you. Happy Rooting! That is our wish! Commenta se traduit em francais? Enracinement heureux!

Q: Dear Thay, from your teaching I learned that the alaya, the ground of everything, is not an immobile thing, it is a kind of floating stream. When I pass away what will be the interplay between my manovijnana(store consciousness), my manas, and my citta(mind consciousness)? Thank you.

A: Can you wait? (laughter)

Q: Yes, I can wait! (laughter)

A: I think it is very important to know that you are passing away right this moment. Life and death are taking place right now, right here and life and death as you see it are only complementary things, things that make each other possible because dying makes the living possible. It is very important to learn to look deeply so that you may see that in this very moment you are dying and you are being reborn. It is very important. And this is by practicing every day and this will bring you another way of looking. In the Tibetan tradition, you know, when the Teacher passes away you have to wait for a few years and you go look for a little boy, may be a little girl and to recognize your Teachers continuation in that little boy or little girl. And in the Tibetan tradition you may practice some kind of testing to know if that little boy is a reincarnation of your teacher or not. So you bring a number of things that have been used by your Teacher in his lifetime and then you bring together other things and you allow the little boy to pick up one of the things and if he picks up the right things you are sure that he is a continuation of your former Teacher. I like that very much, it is very poetic, very charming practice and idea.

But I always tell my students that they don't need to wait until I pass away in order to look for that little boy or little girl, they have to do it now because I have already been reborn, in this very moment, not only as a little boy but as many little boys, not as a little girl, but as many little girls at the same time. I myself recognize them, not all of them, but some of them. And there are continuations that I have not actually seen with my eyes but I know they are there. So I see the fact that I am dying every moment and I am being reborn every moment and I feel good about it because I don't see myself as being limited in this body. Not only in this body, not only in the body that will appear after I pass away, but in many bodies at this very time. Again about the rooting: when I have a disciple practicing well I see myself rooting in him/her and I see him rooting in me. And when the disciple is rooted in me he has a lot, he is in touch with all generations of ancestors, he feels that he is very solid, he has a background that is so solid, many, many generations of teachers are in him as supporters.

So my disciples have lots of advantages when they take root in me. And I get a lot also when I am rooted in him/her because when I see that I am rooted in him/her I feel that I have the future, whole future for me. I feel young, I feel very young, I feel that I am just born, I am being born every moment so the insight of non discrimination, the insight of non interruption is there and that makes me not afraid of death. For I know it cannot do anything to us, death cannot disrupt anything, because even right now the continuation has taken place in many, many forms. And if you look at the Buddha you see that the Buddha is there today in every one of us. The Buddha has a life called the life of wisdom. The mindfulness of the Buddha is his body and his wisdom is his life. If we touch ourselves deeply we see that the body and the life of the Buddha continue today and tomorrow. We can touch the Buddha right here and right now. And later on when you learn more about alayavijnana, you see that alayavijnana it is not only an individual thing it is a collective thing as well. And you will have another notion of alaya that will be closer to reality; that is why I said, can you wait? Further on you will see the teaching on alayavijnana.

Q: Speaking of passing away, my father passed away two weeks ago today, and he died with a lot of anger towards my mother. They are divorced. I think he had a lot of anger in general, my mother just happened to be a particular focus. Looking deeply through the practice I see that I am my father and so I have my fathers anger. And so it is my task to transform that anger for him, for myself, for my wife, for all of us, I wonder if you can offer some words of encouragement. Thank you.

A: You have enough wisdom to start the practice. It is very important to see that your father is always there within yourself and every step you make is for your father, and for his father, and the father of his father also. Every breath taken in mindfulness, every step taken in mindfulness, every smile you can produce is for all of them, so that transformation can take place in every moment. I also practice like that. The time when I practice lying down in a most comfortable way, not doing anything at all, completely at rest, I say: Daddy, let us stay in this position, let us breath and enjoy it. We don't have much to do. You can see your father responding to you in yourself and he has a chance now to stop, to relax, and not to do too much like he used to do. Sometimes I say: Mummy, let us sit still and not worry about anything, we have a chance. Sometimes I practice with my Teacher, I practice with the Buddha. It is wonderful to be aware that everyone is practicing with you because you contain a multitude. You are large, you contain multitudes. When I make steps like this you can visualize that all generations of my ancestors are taking steps with me. The amount of freedom I enjoy and the amount of stopping I enjoy is being shared by all of them. It is wonderful! Transformation and healing is possible every moment. It is very nice to practice for your father, for your mother, and for their father for their mother also. That is why to me it is a great happiness to be able to encounter the Dharma, and when you encounter the Sangha you have an opportunity to encounter the Dharma and the Dharma can change everything. And when you are changed, when you are transformed you become an instrument for change and transformation for many living beings. If you have that kind of desire, if you are motivated by that desire to help, to change you are already a bodhisattva, the energy of the Buddha. You are so alive because you are inhabited by the kind of motivation, that kind of desire. And being with the Sangha, allow yourself to be transported by the Sangha, allowing the Sangha to be rooted in you is a very important practice. Every one of us needs that practice, Thay needs that practice, he needs to be rooted deeply in the Sangha, and he needs the Sangha to be deeply rooted in him, because his happiness has been made of it and will be made of it.

This morning I was practicing walking meditation in the Hermitage and I thought that it was so wonderful that as an animal we have had the opportunity to stand upright on our feet and liberate completely our hands. When we were still chimpanzees we had to walk with our hands. At that time we were able already to use our hands, we could use a stone in order to crush the nut we wanted to eat, we were able to use a stick in order to get the things that are a little bit further, but chimps they had to use their arms a lot in order to walk. But three million

and one half years ago we were able to stand up and completely liberate our arms. We did not use our arms for walking any more, and beginning at that time we began to evolve. With our two arms two hands totally free we can do so many things and our fingers grew and we got a lot of capacity with our two hands. The skillfulness of our hands has helped our brain to develop in a very, very quick way. It took only three million and five hundred thousand years in order for our brain to be three times bigger. Three and one half million years seems to be long but in terms of evolution it is nothing.

At the time we stood up, homo-erectus, that is the name, and as our brain began to develop we continued to get knowledge, we became homo-sapiens and since our brain has doubled and trebled, it needs a lot more oxygen, a lot more sugar. We know that the brain takes up at least 1/5 of the nutrition from our eating because we spend a lot of energy for our brain. Oxygen, glucose and other things. With the presence of the Buddha, and the people who know how to cultivate mindfulness, we become a kind of species called homo-conscious.

We are capable of walking like this and being aware of every step we make. The chimps did not know how to do it, they walk because they want to get something to eat over there. They could never be aware of the step they make. Now I am capable of being in the here and the now and focusing one hundred per cent of my attention to the fact of walking like this, I become free, it is wonderful. And suddenly the Kingdom of God, suddenly the Buddha Land, is available to me because I am conscious. Economically speaking, a step made like this is not very productive, but spiritually speaking it is very rewarding and brings you a lot of happiness. And in terms of evolution this is a wonderful manifestation. It is not that in the chimps there is no alayavijnana, but that in that manifestation conditions are not sufficient for that kind of delight, that kind of penetration, that kind of enlightenment to be expressed. It is already there, but it needs more conditions, so the fact that we are able to stand up and free our hands, the fact that our brains have trebled, the fact that there is a Teacher to tell us how to breathe in and breathe out mindfully and touch the ground with mindfulness. It is wonderful, we belong to a race, the third one, and if we continue to walk like that, the process of evolution will continue.

You know, the way we manage our fingers has made a great impact on our intelligence, on the development of our mind. In Buddhism we see that there are many positions of the hand called mudras. When the Buddha gave a Dharma talk he used this mudra: the first truth, the second truth, the third truth and by using his hands like this his ideas become clearer, his insight deeper. So our hand is an extension of our brain. It is our hands that have nourished our brain, have helped our brain to develop and they inter are. Our intelligence helped our hands to adapt. Look at the baby learning how to grasp things. By using our hands we know that our hands are an extension of our brains, and if we have an instrument like a stick or a stone, the stick and the stone become an extension of our mind. Now we have the computer. The computer is an extension of our hand and of our mind too. That is evolution.

The same thing will happen to our feet, because our feet were used only to help us move from one place to another. But now we have another function for our feet, not just getting there but just walking for the sake of walking only. This function is very important, touching the Kingdom of God, touching Nirvana, touching the Buddha Land, you need your feet in order to do that. If you use your feet like that, you know that in your former times when you were a chimp you didn't do it. So it is wonderful just to walk and to focus your mindfulness on the fact that you are using your feet to touch the realm of enlightenment. The Kingdom of God, the Pure Land can bring you a lot of happiness, a lot of pleasure and the wonderful thing is that you can do it today. You can touch the Kingdom of God today, you can touch the Buddha Land today, you can touch the depths of yourself today just moving your feet. Those kind of feet are biologically possible, those kind of feet are spiritually possible, because the Buddha feet have been transmitted to you. You now know how to walk mindfully and enjoy every step you make. Do use your Buddha feet otherwise you would not be very different from a chimpanzee.